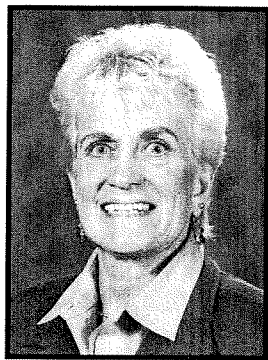


Hammerstrom's

for the people
in the 17th Senate District

Hotline



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April 14, 2003



NEW PROGRAM ALLOWS MICHIGAN FAMILIES TO SAVE MILLIONS ON LOANS.

The Michigan Higher Education Student Loan Authority has announced an exclusive borrower-benefit program, **Michigan Students First**. The program allows borrowers to save through the reimbursement of 3% of their loan origination fee once the loan is fully disbursed. After 36 months of on-time payments, the interest rate is then reduced to zero percent, for as long as the loan remains current. Those signing up for Electronic Payment Savings will earn an additional one-quarter of one percent reduction in the interest rate for 36 months of on-time payments. Federal Stafford and Federal PLUS loans first disbursed on or after January 1, 2003 are eligible for the savings program. For more information call 1-888-643-7521 or log onto www.michigan.gov/mistudentaid and click on the **Michigan Students First** quick-link.

UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS CAN NOW BE FILED ONLINE. Those filing for unemployment may now use the Internet to file their claims for jobless benefits through

the Bureau of Workers' & Unemployment Compensation's website at: www.michigan.gov/bwuc. Online filing gives individuals the added convenience of submitting the information without visiting a local office and takes only a few minutes to complete. The bureau will accept electronic applications Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and on holidays that fall on weekdays.

SARS UPDATE ISSUED BY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH. The Michigan Department of Community Health issued an update on Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) recently. Michigan has now reported two suspect SARS cases to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. SARS symptoms include a fever over 100.5°F and respiratory difficulties including cough, shortness of breath or other breathing difficulties, developing on or after February 1, 2003, in persons who have recently traveled to countries in Asia, or who have had close contact with ill persons who had recently traveled to those countries. The two Michigan cases have both occurred in Kent County residents. Neither of the individuals is hospitalized and both are in good condition. The Department of Community Health is also monitoring the health status of a New Hampshire resident who is hospitalized in Michigan and is considered to be a suspect SARS case. The department is working closely with physicians, local health departments and laboratories across Michigan to identify potential SARS cases.

EMERALD ASH BORER SITES OPENED, SENATE URGES CONGRESS FOR ASSISTANCE. State and local officials announced the opening of four free disposal sites in southeast Michigan for dead and dying ash trees impacted by the Emerald Ash Borer. The Emerald Ash Borer, an exotic insect from Asia, was detected in Michigan in the summer of 2002 and is responsible for killing or damaging millions of ash trees in Southeast Michigan. To control and prevent its further spread, the Michigan Department of Agriculture issued a quarantine on all ash trees and ash wood products, including firewood, in Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties. Under the quarantine, it is illegal to move ash trees, branches, lumber, firewood and wood chips larger than one inch in diameter outside the six counties. Ash tree disposal sites are located in Macomb, Plymouth, Pontiac and Westland. In addition, Senate Resolution 49, which urges Congress to provide assistance to fight the insect, has passed the Senate Natural Resource and Environmental Affairs Committee and awaits consideration on the Senate floor. For more information on the destructive Asian insect, visit www.michigan.gov/mda and use keyword "ash borer."

DID YOU KNOW? The Upper Peninsula became part of Michigan as a land concession to compensate for the loss of the Toledo strip to Ohio in the Toledo War of 1837. The Upper Peninsula now has 15 counties and the greatest distance east to west measures 334 miles.